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JL/ka

25 May 2017

Mr Alan Patchett,
Chair Healthwatch Sunderland
Stanfield Business Centre
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Dear Alan

Thank you for providing the opportunity to respond to the recent report on Mental Health Services in Sunderland which I was pleased to receive on 11th April 2017. The report has interesting findings. I was particularly struck by the high percentages of service users and carers identifying social stigma as a barrier to accessing services, and I am keen that our services play a role in challenging the stigma associated with mental ill health.

In relation to Community Mental Health Services, I note your recommendation 4 - to consider how we can deliver a more consistent service. I can appreciate that this is an important area for service users and their families so that they can build trusting relationships with the professionals caring for them. As a trust we do all we can to support this within the constraints of staff changes and turnover, and the delivery of a 7 day service.

I have asked local community services managers in Sunderland to review your findings and share them with local staff.

Sunderland services have been undergoing an ambitious transformation programme since 2014. The aim of the programme was to significantly improve the quality and effectiveness of local services for our patients and carers through new ways of working and by making better use of resources in order to reduce the reliance on inpatient beds.

We recognise that during service programmes such as this, consistency of service delivery may be affected due to a number of factors, for example; remobilisation of staffing resources and introducing new systems of operation that take time to bed in and a change in how we deliver treatments.

In June 2016, we were very pleased that NTW's services were assessed as 'Outstanding' by the Care Quality Commission. This was an especially important achievement for the community mental health teams as they were the first community teams in the country to meet this high standard. However we are never complacent and the clinical and managerial teams continue to recognise the need to learn and reflect on the quality of service provided and welcome feedback that informs further improvements.

It was a real pleasure to read the positive comments from service users contained within your report. There are also a number of challenging comments. I can assure you that we will continue to strive to provide high quality support to all of our service users and their families, working in partnership with other local services, and organisations like your own.

I am very happy to provide further information in the future.

Yours sincerely



John Lawlor
Chief Executive